Law: We couldn't accept those numbers here. I would probably quit here, as a matter of fact. If I was a police officer here and I saw that wave coming and we were not doing anything about it I'd probably resign. There is no point. It's just over.

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DATE December 15, 1989
TIME 7:06 PM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Robert Siegel, anchor:

Tonight, the last of our profiles of individual deaths by firearms, the handful of the thirty-three thousand people who die each year, when as one psychologist puts it, 'A gun provides a permanent solution to a temporary problem.' Our final report comes from a small town called Camp Springs, Maryland, not far from Washington, D.C. The reporter is NPR's Rene Montagne.

Rene Montagne reporting:

By eleven PM on Monday, Cora Deal was worried. Her twenty-six-year-old son, Rick, still hadn't come home. He always called if he planned to drop by friends or work late. Especially this evening, thought Cora Deal; since Rick's father was out of town on business, Rick knew she was alone. Of course in rural Maryland violence is, well, it's unheard of, but she knew something was wrong and so she called her married daughter. By midnight, accompanied by her son-in-law, Cora Deal pulled into the parking lot of the shopping center where Rick Deal had his florist shop.

Cora Deal (Victim's Mother): It was very foggy, and when we got almost up to the shop, my son-in-law said, 'There's Rick's truck in the parking lot.' And he looked over and said, 'My god, the lights are all on in the shop.' And I pulled the car just up in front of the shop and jumped out- like we could see, we could see people in there- detectives, I'd say there was probably a half-a-dozen people you could see wandering around. And I ran to the door. The door was locked. I started banging on the window, and one of the detectives came to the door. And I said, 'Is there a problem?' And he said, 'Yes.' I think he said, 'There's been a robbery.' And I said, 'Is my son dead?' And he said, 'Yes.'

Montagne: That must of hit you pretty hard?

Deal: I collapsed.

Carol Landrom (Officer, Prince George's County Police): Rick was on the floor, on his back. Gunshot to the head.

Montagne: Officer Carol Landrom (sp) of the Prince George's County Police was on the scene that night when Cora Deal came pounding at the window. When Mrs. Deal began sobbing, her

son-in-law helped her to the curb. No way, says Officer Landrom, would the detectives have let her in the shop to see her son.

Landrom: I've been on the police department for sixteen-and-a-half years. I've seen quite a few bodies. It was a mess, it was a- a awful, awful mess.

Cecil Deal (Victim's Father): Cora called me about two- 2:45- 2:30, and the worst thing can happen to you- hopefully it never happens- is for your phone to ring at 2:30 in the morning, particularly if you're out of town, because you know no one is going to call you and find out how you feel or what you had for dinner or this type thing at 2:30 in the morning. And I didn't want to pick up the phone, to be quite frank.

Montagne: Cecil Deal sits in his living room the week after his son was murdered and he says he still can't figure it. Rick was always doing for others, and twice (he repeats to me something the police told him) that in several days of questioning old friends and acquaintances, detectives couldn't find a single person with a bad thing to say about Rick.

Cecil Deal: And not only that, there's nothing in there to steal that you want. I mean, who wants a flower arrangement? Who wants a bud vase, you know? Who wants some ribbon? This is the things we sell. So it's nothing to bring in there to steal, and it's just very little cash. But of course, I guess people kill for twenty-five dollars anymore, I don't know.

Montagne: Cora Deal can't figure it, because she's sure here son would never have resisted an armed intruder. He would have handed over all the money, she says, Rick would have given a gunman the store. The police agree. Rick let in whoever robbed him around closing time. He might have known the assailant or not- Rick was a trusting person- but he didn't put up a struggle.

Landrom: It appeared as though he was pretty much taken by surprise. Maybe the person had been talking to him. He could have possibly been looking down at whatever he was counting or whatever. The person may have just walked up and stuck a gun in his head and said, 'That's it,' or he may not have said anything- the suspect may not have said a word. Just come up and shot him in the head, taken the case and gone.

Montagne: As she thinks back on that night, Officer Carol Landrom remembers this detail: Rick had been listening to the radio when he was shot. The homicide detectives kept it on as they went about their work.

Landrom: And as it turned out, it- it was one of the talk radio shows. They were having a discussion on whether or not the recently voted handgun law in Maryland was being effective or not. And everybody just kind of looked at each other like, 'You've got to be kidding; you've got to be kidding.'

Montagne: There's surely irony in Rick Deal's death. For one

thing his shop is located directly across the street from Andrews Air Force Base, that's where the President boards Air Force One. A better protected location would be hard to find. And then there is the shop itself, decked out in wedding pictures and brightly colored blooms.

Landrom: When you think about a homicide scene, homicide scenes that I have witnessed, rarely are there flowers and bouquets and ribbons and the kind of things that go along with celebrations as opposed to a violent death. And on the one hand, you see something that is so gruesome, and two feet away from them are ribbons. Doesn't fit.

Montagne: Cecil Deal knows it will never fit. There's no making sense of Rick's murder, he says. There's only the struggle to live with it, something he didn't think he could do in those first few days after his son's death.

Cecil Deal: I couldn't talk about it and I couldn't stop crying. Everything and everyone I talked to just reminded me of something related to him. And I had trouble greeting people. I had trouble talking to the police. And I don't know why, I don't think that I'm an overly emotional person- I mean, I like to think I'm a little bit on the macho side I guess. But things like this bring you to your knees real quickly.

Montagne: Detectives did find some clues. The Deals say if the police ever find who did this to their son it will help. For now, the family is gaining strength from other things: sympathy cards still pour in each day and there was Rick's funeral. Four hundred people showed up. A lot, says Mr. Deal proudly, for a young man just starting out. In Washington, I'm Rene Montagne.

Siegel: Arizona Senator Dennis DeConcini was once the National Rifle Association's man of the month for his role in opposing gun control legislation, but today he is anything but a champion to the thousands of gun owners in his home state. They are furious at Senator DeConcini's proposed ban on the sale of at least nine types of assault rifles. Sandy Tolin prepared this report.

Unidentified Man #1: Gun owners who have supported DeConcini for years felt betrayed. It was just like someone finding out that their spouse was cheating on them.

Unidentified Man #2: I'd feel the same way as if I had a daughter who went into prostitution, you know. It's that kind of an afront to me.

Unidentified Man #3: I'm a wounded, Purple Heart veteran of the Korean War. Nobody's going to take my guns without a fight. I didn't go there and lay my life on the line to have a bunch of weasels like DeConcini and the rest of them trying to get my guns.

Sandy Tolin reporting:

These people don't care that Dennis DeConcini's assault weapons bill targets only some semiautomatic rifles. Some of these people don't own assault rifles, never fired one in

their lives. Staunch NRA members, defenders of the Second Amendment, they don't want anyone telling them what kind of gun they can and cannot own. They want Senator DeConcini and his assault weapons bill stopped right now.

John Siedel (Gunman): I started out .38 revolver, it's the first gun I ever owned, and I've progressed up to owning .50 Caliber Browning belt-fed machine guns. At one time, I had one hundred and eighty-two handguns. I have now forty-seven machine guns- forty seven.

Tobin: John Siedel has enough guns to give two or three to everyone on his block. A Colt .45 revolver in a leather sheath sits loaded on his kitchen counter. A dozen silver barreled Smith and Wesson revolvers fill a glass case in his den. Two huge safes are filled with semiautomatic rifles and machine guns.

Siedel: That's a .50 caliber Browning, this is an HK 21, this is a G3, there's MP-5SD's, a couple M-60's, MP-5's, a Armalite 180, Uzi's, Seventy-sixes, MAC's, silencers, you name it, I've got it, you know (inaudible) safe over here full.

Tobin: Siedel sells the cartridges used for automatic and semiautomatic weapons. He is also a licensed machine gun dealer, ammunitions manufacturer, and, until recently, head of the Arizona Citizens to Recall DeConcini.

Siedel: His bill is the beginning of the end of all guns to be manufactured. They're not trying to confiscate them. They're just going to say you can't make any more, you can't import anymore, you're going to lose everything you have to attrition. Within twenty years be a few people left, you go out and shoot every weekend, even if it's a couple boxes of .38's or .37's (sic), your gun wears out in four to five years.

Tobin: Senate Bill 747 targets semiautomatic assault rifles; the kind that allows you to fire thirty or forty rounds without reloading; the kind you can easily convert to fully automatic machine guns; the kind used in the schoolyard killings at Stockton, California last January: the Uzi, the Streetsweeper, the MAC-10, the Colt AR-15 and others. The bill would ban import, shipment, or sale of these and other assault weapons, but only those made or imported after the ban takes place. Current legal owners of those weapons, like John Siedel, would be able to keep them. But Siedel, a Republican who voted three times for Dennis DeConcini, sees a dangerous erosion of constitutional rights in the Senator's new bill.

Siedel: To ban any guns is the beginning of the end of the second amendment. We're one of the few countries left in the world that have that right. And our founding fathers- a speech by Thomas Jefferson that sticks in my ears (sic), rings like a bell. It was designed to be the protection of the people against tyranny internal as well as external. Because if any government doesn't trust me with a gun, why should I trust them at all?

Senator Dennis DeConcini (Democrat, Arizona): This doesn't take anything away from anybody. It doesn't restrict the Second Amendment of anybody. What it does, it says nine guns

are going to be banned for three years, because drug dealers use them.

Tolin: Senator DeConcini says he didn't introduce the bill because of the Stockton shootings. He says he chose the weapons on this bill from a Treasury Department list of twenty-six assault weapons frequently found in drug raids. Those figures are hotly disputed by opponents of the bill. Many assault rifles, including some made in Arizona, are left out of the bill. The bill also provides ten year prison sentences for possession of assault weapons in drug-related crimes. DeConcini calls S-747 the "Anti-Drug Assault Weapons Limitations Act."

DeConcini: I am not sure this will cut down drug-related crimes, but I think it's worth a try. I'm just not a single-issue senator, never have been, and I'm not one that shies away from an approach, particularly on something as serious as drug in this country- the war on drugs, not to attempt to try something else, if you can insure at the same time your other principle and that is Second Amendment guarantees.

Tolin: DeConcini also calls this bill a compromise from a much more restrictive law proposed by Senator Howard Metzenbaum, but the NRA and its Arizona members don't see it that way. In April, top lobbyist James J. Baker sent a red alert to Arizona members linking 747 to the Metzenbaum bill. "We're not just talking Uzi's," Baker wrote, "we're talking Winchester's, Remington's, Smith and Wesson's." Those guns were not listed in DeConcini's bill. Then Charlton Heston joined the fight in a series of radio ads.

Charlton Heston (Audio from Ad): I'm one of seventy million law-abiding American gun owners who wants to stop crime. Tough prosecutors, tough judges, and tough jail time will do that, but the DeConcini-Metzenbaum gun ban bills won't. Federal Justice Department studies prove what we already know: Criminals don't obey gun ban laws.

Tolin: Gun owners flooded DeConcini's office with phone calls and letters. John Siedel and long-time opponents of DeConcini began organizing a recall drive. Petitions were placed next to cash registers at gun shops across the state.

Bob Jenson (Gun Store Owner): This is where we started, you know, loading ammunition for a few buddies, and pretty soon it got to be every afternoon and every evening and every everything, and pretty soon we built a store.

Tolin: Bob Jenson (sp) built the biggest gun store in the state in accordance with the American dream: He started small, worked hard, raised his kids to take over once he retires, and built himself a fifteen million dollar annual business. Today, he's the kind of businessman who can get a private audience with Dennis DeConcini; Jenson got just that last spring when DeConcini gave assurances he was going to introduce a bill to correct the problems in Senator Metzenbaum's gun control bill.

Jenson: And I thought, 'Neat! This is the guy I voted for, this is the guy I supported.' I walked away from that meeting

feeling pretty good about it. And he said, 'Well, I'll send you a copy of these,' the attorney said, 'I'll send you a copy of the bill as soon as we get it formulated.' Well, I never saw a copy, but I saw it come out in the paper and, boy, I was really shook, and my hero went down the drain right with everyone elses. That's what I hear from dozens and hundreds of my customers. I voted for that guy. I'm a Republican, but I voted for him because of the stance on the firearms issue and on the Second Amendment rights, but boy I'll never vote for him again.

Tolin: About three percent of Bob Jenson's business is in assault rifles, around a half million dollars a year. Right now, a half million in Chinese-made AK-47's bought and paid for by Jenson, still waits to clear customs at Tuscon International Airport. They'll probably wait a long time; AK-47's are part of President Bush's recent ban on importation of assault rifles. But Jenson says he's not worried so much about three percent of his business. He's worried about a right and a way of life.

Jenson: It's not up to a minority group to go out there and determine how you should live. This is one of the things that we're free for. This is one of the things that we enjoy. This is one of things that makes our lifestyle. Somebody says, 'Who needs an AK-47?' Exactly the same person who needs a Sony TV, who needs a motorcycle, who wants to jump out in a parachute, who wants to buy an airplane. The senators probably thought that they could throw the assault guns to the wolves, as it were, and no one would care and even the gun owners wouldn't care. But we view it, specifically, as a foot in the door, camel's nose under the tent if you will, to the elimination of the Second Amendment. Their total goal is the elimination of all firearms in our society.

Unidentified Man #4: Well I was born in Tuscon, Arizona in 1932 and I can't remember the first time I shot a gun. My father gave me a gun from the time I was old enough to use it. I have a gun that came from my grandfather that was used in the Civil War, and I would hate to see that confiscated.

Unidentified Woman #1: How important is freedom of press to you? Is that pretty important to you? That's how gun ownership is to me.

Unidentified Man #5: I have a seventy-nine year old mother. She lives by herself now, and she only weighs eighty-four pounds. And she sleeps with a .38 revolver on her nightstand every night and she knows how to use it.

Unidentified Man #6: I'm one person that I will goddamn well die to defend my rights. Do you understand that? Is that clear? You get that right through your mind right now? You're going to have to kill us to do that, and I'm not bluffing either.

DeConcini: I didn't just wake up one day and say, 'Oh, I think I'll introduce a bill that will get some of the NRA people in Arizona mad at me.' I don't need that political firestorm, and that isn't what motivated me to do it. I doubt whether I can reassure them, because I know some of these people and they really believe this. You can't do anything if

your mind is made up and you're not willing to take an approach for the good of society to try to win the war on drugs.

Siedel: That's an Uzi. This one's a mini-Uzi.

Tolin: A warm Saturday in December in a dessert of weeds, broken glass, old detergent bottles, scraps of furniture, and old tires. The three-wheeled, off-road buggies buzz along a dirt track to the west. John Siedel unloads eight machine guns from his Ram Charger- laying them side-by-side on a folding table.

Siedel: This is a full-sized M-16 (twenty inch barrel). This is an HK-33, HK-91 (or G3) which- with a twenty inch barrel. AK-47 with a sixteen inch barrel.

Tolin: These weapons have been legally converted from semiautomatic rifles to machine guns. It's still legal to buy and sell machine guns in America. It's expensive, two hundred dollars per gun, there's a lot of red-tape and lengthy background security checks. Technically though, it's not hard at all to convert a weapon: Insert a new bolt and with the flick of switch, you can go from semiautomatic, one shot per squeeze, or full auto (or what the gun buffs call, rock-n-roll).

Siedel: Let's start with the M-16 first. This is the AK-47. You'll notice a distinctive sound difference.

Tolin: Siedel grips the AK-47 with both hands, he plants his feet, sets his jaw, his eyes narrow to a fierce squint. His black T-shirt is offset by the drawing of an Uzi and the words, "Happiness is a warm machine gun."

Siedel: We bought a car, I think it was over the Fourth of July weekend, and we came out here and set a van up over there and we blew it to pieces. And then we had the wrecker take it away. To me, to shoot an automobile and turn it into shredded wheat so that it doesn't even resemble a car- blow out the headlights and the grill and watch the metal come popping off it- is kind of like the charge, the challenge, as the ultimate fantasy. That's about as exciting as it gets as far as I'm concerned.

DeConcini: Mr. Siedel is an interesting man. He makes the clips in the magazines for these guns. So, talk about a special interest that he doesn't want to see any limitations that would keep him from selling these to drug dealers or to legitimate people, whoever might buy them. I appreciate his position. I happen to disagree with him.

Tolin: Some sheriffs and police chiefs here support Senate Bill 747, but opposition to the bill is not restricted to shrewd lobbyists or businessmen with a financial stake in the outcome. Sportsmen, competitive shooters, collectors, and some police officers say it will restrict personal rights and create a bureaucratic nightmare for gun owners while being of dubious help in the escalating war on drugs. This federal narcotics agent says this bill will do nothing to help him in the war on drugs.

Unidentified Federal Narcotics Agent: This bill is a move to try to restrict the Constitution because of this particular, quote, "War," but I've been involved in it for almost twenty years. This nation is not serious about stopping the influx of drugs into this country, cause if we were we could. This bill is merely a Band-Aid and an attempt to divert the public's attention and make it appear that the Congress is doing something.

Tolin: But even if the bill does nothing to stop drugs, it isn't clear that most people in Arizona believe that Second Amendment guarantees should cover assault rifles. Despite the best efforts of the NRA, recent polls here show strong approval for a ban on assault weapons, even in gun-toting Arizona where the tavern warnings to check your weapons are there not as tourist attractions. For his part, John Siedel has had an uphill battle in trying to recall DeConcini. A couple of days ago, Siedel suspended his effort to topple DeConcini, and announced a new approach. At a press conference in Phoenix, Siedel joined forces with Ed Buck, the activist who led an effort to recall former Arizona Governor Evan Meacham. The two announced they would explore a wider recall effort focusing on DeConcini and on fellow Arizona Senator John McCain and charges the two improperly intervened in a federal investigation of financier Charles Keating. DeConcini, McCain and three other U.S. senators intervened after receiving substantial campaign contributions from Keating. If a new recall effort is launched, Siedel says, it won't focus too much on the gun ban bill. But even if there is a new focus on the recall, Siedel and his pro-gun volunteers will be there, behind the scenes, working hard. DeConcini's bill is expected to come to a vote early next year. For National Public Radio, this is Sandy Tolin reporting.

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DATE December 16, 1989
TIME 6:45 PM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Lynn Neary, co-anchor:

Last week's massacre of fourteen women at the University of Montreal has left many people wondering how such a brutal act could have happened. The shooting deaths were all the more shocking because they occurred in a country where gun-related violence is relatively uncommon. While Canada has ten times fewer people than the United States, the number of people killed by firearms in Canada is one hundred times less. A similar disparity, although not quite as wide, exists between the cities of Vancouver, British Columbia and Seattle, Washington. As part of our series this week on guns and gun control, we paid a visit to Vancouver and Seattle.

Emil Guillermo, co-anchor:

Comparing two communities, even in the same country, is an exercise fraught with problems. Still, Seattle and Vancouver seem to have plenty in common. Both are port cities with similar geographies and climates, education levels and unemployment rates. But as Stephen Smith reports, Seattle is a much more dangerous place to live.

Stephen Smith reporting:

The Central District is one of Seattle's toughest inner city neighborhoods. Children playing on the streets must navigate between drug dealers and drunks as they and their families try to make a normal life in an increasingly violent community. Guns are a prominent part of that social equation. The number of illegal weapons seized by the Seattle police annually quadrupled during the 1980's. Last year, the police netted some four thousand guns. Former Seattle policeman Chuck Pillen [sp] says that like many American cities, there is growing gang activity in Seattle, and the gangs seem too willing to use their guns.

Chuck Pillen (Former Seattle Police Officer): I was twenty-three years in the, quote, "ghettos" of the city of Seattle and I never had blood on my hands. Now, we've got ten and twelve-year-old kid on our streets with- occasionally their hands on fully automatic weapons, certainly assault weapons, but have no sense of restraint. They have learned- they have been conditioned to think, 'You've got a gun, you shoot it. Bang, bang, bang.'

Smith: Some people in the Central District are getting guns to protect themselves. A song titled "Hip Hop Soldier" by a

Seattle rap musician was a local hit last year. It offers this advice: 'Stay away from drugs and crime, but buy yourself a gun.' (Audio of song.) This rap musician, known as Sir Mix-a-lot, says law-abiding black people in ghettos like the Central District must protect themselves against criminals, because the police won't do it for them.

Sir Mix-A-Lot (Rap Musician): If your house gets robbed and you call the police, they may get there an hour later. If there's no way to defend yourselves, then the criminals just win, and you know, it's something I feel pretty strongly about. We've been robbed a few times and since we've had guns in the house, we haven't been robbed.

Smith: The fact is though, that most people in the Central District are either unwilling or uninterested in living an armed life, and won't buy a gun. Those who do purchase a handgun in Washington must wait five days and pass a background check. Children and many convicted felons are precluded from owning a handgun.

One of the busiest gun shops in Seattle is a place called Butch's Guns. Store manager Butch Hewlitt Jr. [sp] believes tougher gun restrictions in the city would do little but penalize the people who use guns for fun. And Hewlitt says that while a growing number of his customers want guns for protection, most people buy guns because they enjoy sports shooting.

Butch Hewlitt Jr. (Owner, Butch's Guns): If you've done any shooting at all, you'll understand what it feels like to pop off five or six rounds at your target. You just...(audio of Butch making gun noises)... oh, that was nice and relaxing. And it is. It's- I don't look at it any different than me going- playing racquetball- is to go down to the gun club and go shooting.

Smith: Across the border, three hours north of Seattle, the members of this gun club in Vancouver also enjoy shooting for recreation. But in Canada, gun laws are far more restrictive, especially for handguns. Canadians must first get permission to buy a handgun, which is fairly rare, and then get a permit to transport their guns from home to the shooting range. Unlike many gun enthusiasts in the United States, Burt Wilson says few of his fellow club members in Vancouver mind the government restrictions. Wilson believes limiting the way people may carry their guns limits the potential for violence.

Burt Wilson (Gun Club Member, Vancouver): I think that you're asking for trouble when you allow people to carry guns anywhere, anytime, anyplace. We all know there's times when there's too much drinking, there are arguments and there's confrontations, that these guns can be used to carry out their emotions.

Smith: This intersection, Cordova and Main in East Vancouver, is at the hub of Vancouver's drug dealing and prostitution. In fact, it's known as one of the roughest urban neighborhoods in all of Canada. Gun violence would be a frightening routine in a similar U.S. neighborhood, but people in East Vancouver say there are very few guns on the street. Community activist

Jim Green heads a citizen's group trying to make the neighborhood safer.

Jim Green (Citizen's Group): I've lived down here since 1971. I've never seen anyone with a gun. I've never heard anyone suggest they wanted a gun or that they had any use for it. I mean, even though we do have crime and right out this window I can watch drug deals all day- I don't know of one soul that has ever mentioned having a gun. Now, I know that people have other things. Like, I have a little baseball bat at home in case someone were to break in, but I would never think of getting a gun.

Smith: Penalties for illegal gun use are higher in Vancouver, but while tougher gun controls may be one reason that there are fewer firearms in Canada, criminologist Neil Boyd of Vancouver's Simon Fraser University says, in his country, there's a fundamentally different attitude about guns than in the United States. Boyd traces that attitude back to the settlers.

Neil Boyd (Criminologist): Canada has been founded on a deference to authority, which has its own costs, and I think the American tradition is one of violence; that was what accompanied the birth of America and that has been an important part of American culture. We are simply a more civilized country than you are.

Smith: At Vancouver's Eastside Police Precinct, a staff sergeant aptly named Bob Law says the social disregard for guns in Canada extends to the criminals.

Bob Law (Vancouver Staff Sergeant): Even if you're a crook, at some point in time you were brainwashed as a kid in this country. Half the- half the criminal element around don't want to have anything to do with it. 'I'll peddle my drugs, I'll run my girl in the street, I'll do the burglary, but I don't want that gun. I don't want the gun.'

Smith: The difference in gun violence between Seattle and Vancouver was studied recently by public health officials in both cities. Their controversial report found that a resident of Seattle was seven times more likely to be assaulted by someone with a firearm than a resident of Vancouver, and five times more likely to be murdered with a handgun. The study was published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine. One of the authors, Dr. James Ferris of the University of British Columbia, says from a strict public health standpoint, Seattle needs tougher handgun restrictions.

Dr. James Ferris (University of British Columbia): Firearms are inherently the most dangerous weapon available to a criminal, and if you were to abolish the availability of firearms, criminals would still use weapons, but it's much easier medically to treat someone with a stab wound than it is to treat someone with a firearm injury, and I think that's the bottom line.

Smith: The study had problems, and the doctors pointed to some of them: It was hard to accurately determine the availability of guns. Drug activity in the two cities appear to be different, and the general findings in Seattle and

Vancouver may not extend to other cities.

Gun control opponents in the United States, like the National Rifle Association, sharply attacked the study, and criminologist Gary Kleck [sp] of Florida State University, a leading researcher on the gun issue, dismissed the study altogether.

Gary Kleck (Florida State University): The research was worthless. There isn't a legitimate gun control expert in the country who regarded it as legitimate research. There were only two cities studied, one Canadian, one U.S. There are literally thousands of differences across cities that could account for violence rates, and these authors just arbitrarily seized on gun levels and gun control levels as being what caused the difference. It's the sort of research that never should have seen the light of day.

Smith: Whether or not the study was valid, many Canadians shake their heads at the number of people shot each year in the United States. Our countries share a common language, a roughly similar ancestry, and a border thousands of miles long. But Canadians, like Vancouver police sergeant Bob Law are not willing to share our tolerance for guns and violence.

Law: We couldn't accept those numbers here. I'd probably quit here, as a matter of fact. If I was a police officer here and I saw that wave coming and we weren't doing anything, I'd resign. There's no point. It's just- it's over.

Smith: For National Public Radio, this is Stephen Smith reporting.

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PROGRAM Weekend Edition

STATION WAMU Radio
NPR Network

DATE December 16, 1989 10:00 AM

CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT The NRA and Law Enforcement Officers

SUSAN STAMBERG: All week long National Public Radio has been examining guns and gun control. That series continues this morning.

It wasn't too long ago that the nation's law officers and the National Rifle Association saw eye-to-eye on the issue of guns. Not anymore, as NPR's Celeste Wesson explains.

CELESTE WESSON: The NRA ran police shooting competitions and did gun training in some departments. They even assumed that they spoke for the police when they lobbied on Capitol Hill, and most police didn't think twice about those ties to the NRA.

Joseph McNamara, now police chief of San Jose, was always one of the exceptions.

JOSEPH McNAMARA: Barbara, this is a letter of reply to a gentleman from...

WESSON: Just sitting at his desk dictating a letter you can see that Chief McNamara is intense. He runs a highly regarded department. He's published two detective novels and he grows roses. And his looks, his ability to turn a quotable phrase, and his relish in taking on controversy have gotten him frequent appearances on television. Most often his subject is gun control.

McNAMARA: As a young policeman I found myself one day looking into the barrel of a handgun pointed at me by a fifteen year

old youngster with two and a half pounds of pressure on that trigger. He held my life in his hands. I wouldn't be here talking to you today.

I never forgot the meaning of that encounter that this little boy, really, who was no danger to anyone, was a potential killer because a handgun had fallen into the wrong hands.

WESSON: McNamara says he saw a lot of gun violence then as a beat cop in Harlem. And in the early '80s when cocaine surged into the country there was more, much of it aimed at the police. Other cops started looking for ways to stop the violence. And that led to questioning from the positions taken by the NRA. About that time the NRA fought a bill to outlaw what were known as "cop killer bullets", claiming that the bill would also eliminate all conventional rifle ammunition.

Chief McNamara remembers the reaction.

McNAMARA: There was a shock that ran through policing. How in the world could anyone oppose outlawing bullets that were specifically designed to penetrate a police officer's protective vest and kill police officers. How could someone be against that?

WESSON: Three years later the NRA delivered an even bigger shock. They backed a gun decontrol bill to make it easier to move guns across state lines, and harder to trace gun sales. The police reaction was unprecedented. It wasn't just Chief McNamara and a few other voices. The police got political. They testified, they lobbied. The day of the vote dozens of officers arrived in uniform to buttonhole their representatives.

One of them was Dewey Stokes, who's now president of the Fraternal Order of Police. He's a gun collector, and belongs to the Ohio Gun Club. And he thinks most people should be able to buy a handgun. But his experience in Washington left him disillusioned with the NRA.

DEWEY STOKES: At first I could kind of understand what their fears were. It was, if you stopped this they're going to take away our shotguns and our hunting equipment and stuff. And then I -- you know, when you got into it with the NRA the attitude of the leadership was that we don't listen, we dictate, we're going to tell you what you will or will not pass when it comes to gun issues in this country. That was a shock to me that they would have that type of attitude.

WESSON: A shift had taken place. More police were now working along with Chief McNamara for limits on guns. But not all cops. One of the most passionate police voices for the NRA belongs to Leroy Pyle, an officer on McNamara's own force in San Jose. Pyle's house is a testament to his dedication. The living room is stacked with NRA flyers and decorated with a picture of movie cowboy Ronald Reagan drawing his revolver. There's a whole room devoted to

computers and printers, and a phone answering machine...

MAN: ....some representatives from the National Rifle Association, the California...

WESSON: ...to the Firearms Action Hotline. Officer Pyle has been fueding with his chief for years, and he says one of the bitterest moments came in 1987 when Chief McNamara did a magazine ad with the national group, Handgun Control, Incorporated. Pyle was outraged.

LEROY PYLE: He was doing more with that ad to make good, honest citizens dislike the police than all the radicals who, you know, called us pigs and tried to say that the police were evil, all the hippies I'd ever worked with, all the Black Panthers I'd ever worked with in my twenty-five year career history. Over half the households in the United States have guns. Millions of people who are now wondering why the police want to take away their guns.

WESSON: The ad prompted the NRA in Washington to launch a letter campaign against McNamara. The letters, McNamara says, called him fascist, a communist, not a real cop. They were personal, nasty. But Wayne LaPierre, head of the NRA's lobbying arm, defends the campaign.

WAYNE LaPIERRE: When anyone distorts the position the National Rifle Association has taken on a legislative issue, we certainly attempt to get the truth out. So naturally, when that happens we not only have headquarters but we encourage our membership to write and call, and also to talk to their local papers and make sure that the facts are known in terms of the positions NRA has actually taken.

WESSON: The NRA campaign didn't end there. It resumed a year later when McNamara discussed drug legalization on Oprah Winfrey's television show. McNamara says he only advocated study of new ways to fight drugs. But he says, that's not how the NRA represented his remarks in an ad they placed in USA Today, Time, and Newsweek.

McNAMARA: They said, in effect, don't believe what this man says about firearms because he wants to legalize crack. The worst thing you can say about a police chief is that he wants to legalize it, or he's soft on drug enforcement while communities are screaming for us to control this problem. It's not something that wouldn't cause trouble. It caused a lot of trouble here. And there was one purpose here in doing that, and that was this powerful, national lobby was trying to destroy the career of a local police chief. It was as that. Why else would they do that?

WESSON: But McNamara held on. As the first police chief willing to do an ad against the NRA, he says he had to. Then, as other officers followed suit, the NRA went after them too. But the

attack that really upset police was against Chief Joe Casey of Nashville, Tennessee. Unlike McNamara, he wasn't a gun control activist.

JOE CASEY: I'm certainly not a liberal. My nickname is Hang 'em High Joe.

WESSON: Chief Casey is also, say other cops, a really nice guy and an honorable man who acts on what he believes. In this case he supported a federally-mandated waiting period for handgun buyers.

CASEY: I believed in the waiting period. We have one here in Nashville that's a fifteen day waiting period. And I don't think it's kept the law-abiding person from getting as gun that wanted one. We've been able to screen out some people that shouldn't own a gun. And hopefully, and I believe very strongly we possibly have saved some lives from doing it.

WESSON: So Casey did an add with Handgun Control, and the NRA began another letter writing campaign, a bitter one. This time the letter writers urged the Mayor to fire Chief Casey. He's still upset nearly two years later at being called dishonest.

CASEY: That's what they said, Joe Casey's a liar. That was their letter, that's what it said. And we've got to stop this liar, you know. The law enforcement that knows me knows that's not true.

WESSON: Casey kept his job. Other officers were less lucky. NRA campaigns prevented them from being hired in new jobs. But the NRA's tactics didn't scare law enforcement, according to president Dewey Stokes of the Fraternal Order of Police. Instead, he says, they got angry.

STOKES: I call that a restriction and an abuse of power. And I don't think that the majority of our police officers in this country approve of that tactic. That'd be to me the same way as taking away the tools of a carpenter and then telling him or her to go out and earn a living.

WESSON: The National Rifle Association campaign to discredit the chiefs who opposed them backfired. Instead of driving a wedge between law enforcement leaders and the rank-and-file, it broadened police opposition to the NRA. Then early this year the NRA took a stand that caused it one of its last prominent friends in law enforcement, Los Angeles Police Chief Darryl Gates.

Chief Gates played this tape to show how many assault rifles there are out in the streets. Some of his men recorded it standing on the roof of a Los Angeles precinct station as burst after burst of automatic fire rang in the new year.

Chief Gates is a very conservative man. He refused for

years to join the other cops against the NRA until the NRA opposed limits on assault rifles. And even now his criticism is regretful.

DARRYL GATES: What disturbs me most, I guess, is that some of the most responsible people in the United States are members of the NRA, people who believe that we ought not to have gun control, who believe in state's rights. And I could never quite understand why these very responsible people would not say, it's time to cut back.

WESSON: Gates was moved to speak out when two of his officers were killed last year, men he says would be alive if his assailants had not been armed with assault rifles. So he testified before Congress in favor of banning the weapons.

GATES: And I'm getting pretty sick and tired of presenting flags to widows and little kids and trying to explain away why it is we have an arms race in the United States. I support, I support your legislation, I support...

WESSON: Gates' testimony had enormous impact. His conservative standing helped persuade other conservatives. The President banned assault rifle imports, and the Governor of California signed the first state assault rifle ban.

Those limits on assault rifles showed that the police could win. And the defection of Darryl Gates proved how isolated the National Rifle Association had become. Nonetheless, the NRA's Wayne LaPierre insists that most rank-and-file police are still loyal.

LaPIERRE: All I'm saying is while there was a Chief Gates there were 225 officers in -- a couple of weeks later that were maintaining our position was correct. NRA's relatonship with individual rank-and-file police, and police organizations continues to grow.

WESSON: But the NRA's own actions belie the truth of that statement. No major police groups support them, so they're helping start new groups that will, groups that say they're law enforcement but that let anybody join.

PYLE: One other thing you found at your table is an application for LEPSA, that's Law Enforcement for the Preservation of the Second Amendment.

WESSON: LEPSA is the largest of the new groups. Here in San Jose, pro-NRA policeman Leroy Pyle is recruiting members, not among other officers but at a banquet for competitive shooters.

PYLE: ...do. If you would like to help law enforcement officers throughout the nation become a little more vocal, a little stronger in these Second Amendment efforts, this is what you can do.

WESSON: Pyle concedes that police who oppose the NRA have done a good job of organizing. Now he says it's time to fight back. And he believes that a silent majority of cops will support the NRA.

PYLE: If you want to know what a policeman really feels about gun control, all you do is ask him, hey, if you weren't a cop tomorrow would you have a gun in your house? Because you won't find a real policeman who won't have a gun in his home.

WESSON: Officer Pyle's boss forcasts a different future for the fight between the police and the NRA. Pro-gun control Chief Joseph McNamara says it's time for law enforcement to publicly identify which politicians go along with the NRA.

McNAMARA: This weapon was illegal under the Law Enforcement Bill. This is a 20-round clip. It will fire that clip in about three or four seconds.

WESSON: This spring, that's just what Chief McNamara did, holding an assault rifle up to the cameras and telling reporters which local politician would allow it to remain legal.

McNAMARA: The free ride is over. If you're going to support the NRA you may do it at the price of being called anti-law enforcement. And I think that may finally balance the books here and let the politicians vote in favor of what the public opinion polls say that the people want.

WESSON: The National Rifle Association is still a powerful force with plenty of money to target politicians who try to break away. Nonetheless, through their effort to bring their old ally, the police, back into line, the NRA has created a sophisticated and formidable political enemy. Law enforcement, which used to let the NRA do its talking, has discovered its own voice.

I'm Celeste Wesson reporting.

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EMILE GUILLERMO: In south Florida, the Yellow Pages lists more numbers for gun dealers than for pizza parlors. The region is one of the biggest handgun markets in the country. For a fee of $150, a Florida resident can obtain a license to carry a handgun in a purse or briefcase. And while it's perfectly legal, it doesn't always guarantee protection.

As part of our weeklong series on guns and gun control, Jo Magleno looks at the debate over the use of handguns for self-defense.

STEVE MALLON: Okay, let's go and get started. We have a couple of more people coming. But as they arrive, they can just join us....

JOE MAGLENO: In a small, rented conference room in a Fort Lauderdale hotel, Steve Mallon welcomes about a dozen men and women to a class on how to obtain a concealed weapons' permit. Mallon, who spent 15 years in law enforcement, now makes quite a handsome living as a firearms trainer and security expert. He provides bodyguards for visiting diplomats, designs security systems for Japanese airports and, in classes like this one, teaches lawyers, construction workers, nurses and housewives how not to be victims of violent crime.

MALLON: The fact is what we're talking about here is your ability to carry and/or use that small handgun to deliver a minimum of two rounds against the body of your attacker, thereby slamming him to the ground so that he's the one laying there bleeding looking up to the sky, and not you.

MAGLENO: The group sits listening, mesmerized by

Mallon, who looks more like a professor than a macho avenger. But that's what makes his presentation so powerful. He could be the father, brother, uncle or husband of anyone in this room. His words cut right to the heart of the fear these men and women feel: fear that has made them turn to a gun for self-protection. Some are considering the option of owning a gun; some, like Dawn, already do.

DAWN: I'm an interior designer. I go into a lot of people's homes. A lot of times the situation's where you can be taken and overpowered. It's never happened to me, but I always anticipate that it could.

If I don't have it, I'm at a real loss.

MAGLENO: For five years now, Dawn, a small blonde in her early 30s has carried a .357 magnum in her purse every day. Her apartment has been burglarized several times. A number of her friends have been assaulted and robbed. For her and for Felice, a young, single mother, carrying a gun for protection has become an unfortunate way of life in south Florida.

FELICE: I don't care for guns. I never did. I don't like them. My father was killed by one. I don't care for guns. But I have to have 'em. I live alone. I have two children. If I don't protect us, nobody will. My kids need a mother for the rest of their life, one that's alive.

MAGLENO: During the three hour-long class, Steve Mallon will lay out the advantages as well as the disadvantages of owning a gun. He tells the class that simply purchasing and carrying a handgun won't insure their safety. He tells the men and women they must be prepared to shoot to kill. And while they can agree to this in the classroom, it's difficult to predict how they will respond under pressure. Mallon says that even seasoned police officers sometimes hesitate before pulling the trigger.

MALLON: They did a recent survey, or questionnaire -- a survey of the home burglars in Florida prisons. And on that questionnaire, there was this question. "Of the following two things, which would you rather face in a home burglary: A), big dog; B), homeowner with a gun?" Do you know what 100% of the Florida burglars said they would rather face?

MAN: A dog.

MALLON: They'd rather face you coming out of your bedroom with your gun than they would a big dog.

Why?

[Confusion of several voices.]

MALLON: That's exactly the point. They said the dog doesn't hesitate. The dog senses, hears, smells, goes for 'em. They said the homeowner almost always screws it up.

MAGLENO: And one of the biggest mistakes most people make is not buying the right kind of gun. Mallon says nothing less than a .38 will do the job.

MALLON: A robber attacks a victim. The victim has a .25 automatic. The robber has a .357 magnum. The victim pulled his .25; put eight shots -- eight shots in the chest of the robber. The robber shoots and kills the victim, two shots from his magnum. The robber then gets into his own car and drives himself to Jackson Memorial Hospital. He's fine. Eight bullet holes in him. Never put him down at all.

Add to that, a man on rock cocaine. And I'm going to tell you what. You've got to tear big chunks of meat out of him. That's the only way to put him down.

MAGLENO: Steve Mallon believes the only place you can learn about guns is here on the range.

MALLON: This is not the right gun for you, but you have small hands, and you're holding it exactly as you should. Okay?

Now one of the things that we need to find out [is] if you have the hand strength and forearm strength to squeeze the trigger. So what I want you to do is....

MAGLENO: He sets a box of ammunition in front of each student, helps each person grip the gun correctly, then works on breathing technique and proper stance. And he marks each paper target, the outline of a person, with yellow dots just below the neck to the middle of the chest. This is the center of mass, he tells his students. This is where you shoot to stop an intruder or an attacker dead in their tracks.

[Sound of gunfire.]

MALLON: Pull the trigger. All right. Real good. Do you see where it hit? Okay. Now you've done it one time. You can do it 50 more times. Okay?

MIKE FRIEDMAN: We have a fixation, a passion, if you would, with the pistol.

MAGLENO: Mike Friedman is a Democratic state representative from Miami Beach and longtime advocate of gun control.

He's lived in south Florida for more than 30 years. He describes the once vacation capital of the world as Beirut now, with the number of guns on the streets and in the hands of both law-abiding citizens as well as the criminal element spiraling out of control. Friedman places a great deal of the blame for this on his colleagues on the legislature. Several years ago, lawmakers wiped all local gun laws off the books. Now Florida has some of the weakest gun regulations in the nation. Nearly anyone can buy a gun and get a permit to carry it.

FRIEDMAN: I'd have to do more to drive a car in the state of Florida. And that sent a very clear message to everyone that the state of Florida is abandoning its responsibility of providing public safety and is turning it over to the people to get the best hold and do the best you can.

MAGLENO: That doesn't sound like such a bad idea to Maryanne Hammer. As head of the NRA-backed group Unified Sportsmen of Florida, Hammer was almost singlehandedly responsible for the changes in Florida's gun law.

Before the concealed weapons' act was passed, a person seeking a permit to carry a pistol had to prove a need for one. A storeowner who carried a lot of cash to the bank would have gotten a concealed weapons' license. But now all a person needs to do is fill out an application correctly and mail in a check. Almost 60,000 Floridians have taken advantage of the change, and that, says Hammer, shows that people are taking responsibility for their own protection.

MARYANNE HAMMER: People realize that law enforcement groups are understaffed, over-worked, and they can't be there when you need 'em. And so if you want to prevent a crime against yourself or your family, you have to be ready and willing to do it yourself.

MAGLENO: And Hammer says that does make a difference.

HAMMER: If you look back into the late '60s, we had a high incidence of rape in the Orlando area, and young women became very fearful and started buying guns. Well, the Orlando Sentinel and the local sheriff's department became alarmed because they feared that these women were buying guns and weren't learning to use them. So they scheduled training courses. And by the time they finished with all of their classes, they had trained some six thousand women. Well, the result being that the following year the rape rate in Orlando dropped to practically nothing, and other crimes against the person dropped as well because there had been quite a lot of publicity about all these young women, and older women, having firearms and knowing how to use them.

MAGLENO: Having a firearm and knowing how to use it made a big difference to 87 year-old William Moon. Though he can barely get around his home in South Miami, he successfully defended it from a robber back in July.

WILLIAM MOON: I went around the kitchen door. And just as I got to the kitchen door, he banged the jalousies in. When he reacned in, down and turned the lock, I hit him a slight bent (?) over the arm with the gun, see, and pulled the trigger on it. Boy, he let a whoop out and he took off, see.

MAGLENO: So you actually shot the gun?

MOON: Oh, yeah, I shot the gun to scare him, see. So I had a .38 police special, see. I have another one, and I'm going to use the other gun, and I'm going to shoot the next time. And it's a .45 Smith & Wesson. It'll put them out of their misery.

MAGLENO: Though Moon was successful in scaring off that robber, studies show that homeowners are far more likely to lose a gun in a burglary than to use a gun to stop one. In fact, during that week in July, William Moon was the only homeowner in Miami to thwart a burglary with a gun. That same week, 50 other guns were stolen by burglars in south Florida.

Dr. Gary Gleck says that's the chance people take when they buy a gun for self-protection. Gleck is a criminologist at Florida State University who's been researching guns and violence in America. He says a great many variables will affect a person's ability to use a gun for self-protection.

GARY GLECK: The problem is you never know for sure in advance whether the crime is going to occur in such a way that you have enough time to get to the gun, to find it, to be able to point it at the person. The reality is also that the vast majority of victimizations occur in circumstances which probably don't permit the use of a gun. If you get victimized away from your home and you keep your gun in your home, you can't use a gun defensively.

MAGLENO: In fact, Gleck says, a gun in the house may actually put a person at greater risk.

GLECK: If you have children in the household and you're not willing to keep the gun locked up, then there's a tremendous risk. If you have a person who's an alcoholic or has a short temper, keeping a gun around is a very bad idea.

POLICE DISPATCHER: Dade County Police....

MARY JO STRAUSS: Hi. I need an ambulance.

DISPATCHER: Okay. Where are you, ma'am?

STRAUSS: One-fifty Fourth Court.

DISPATCHER: Okay. I have police and fire on the way. Stay on the line with me. Do not hang up.

STRAUSS: I need them immediately.

MAGLENO: For Mary Jo Strauss and her husband, Judd, using a gun for self-defense had tragic consequences.

It was just a year ago. Judd and Mary Jo had been out partying with their friends, starting off the holiday season early. Mary Jo left the group and drove out to their rural south Miami home.

STRAUSS: My husband came home. He went upstairs. There was somebody moving around upstairs in my house, and he shot them.

DISPATCHER: ...He shot them, or you shot him?

STRAUSS: No, my husband shot him.

JUDD STRAUSS [In background]: Hurry! Hurry! Get an ambulance!

MAGLENO: By the time help arrived, it was too late to save Judd and Mary Jo's best friend and neighbor, Tim Holk. Homicide detectives found the young man riddled by bullets, sprawled on the floor in the loft, his body surrounded by brightly wrapped Christmas presents. He, too, had been drinking that cold night. He came over to visit his friends. And when he found they weren't home, he decided to wait for them. He broke into their house and fell asleep in their loft. It was Tim Holk and not an intruder that Mary Jo heard that night. It was Tim Holk that Judd killed with his Rueger (?) mini-14 semi-automatic rifle, one of ten guns he kept throughout his home.

Detectives have only recently closed the case of Tim Holk's homicide. Judd Strauss was not charged in the death. It was ruled justifiable. But the couple has moved from their South Miami home and left no forwarding address.

Those on both sides of the debate over the use of handguns for self-defense agree this case is extreme, not typical. But the tragedy is real nonetheless, and it stands as a warning, both sides say, to never take the responsibility of owning a gun lightly.